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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000503

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2018  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#)  
SUBJECT: NORWAY'S VIEWS ON UN THIRD COMMITTEE HR STRATEGY  
REF: STATE 93981

Classified By: Political Counselor Kristen Bauer for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Poloff met with Anne Merchant, Senior Advisor in the MFA Section for Human Rights and Democracy, to discuss reftel points. Norway shares all of our human rights concerns, but urges caution with respect to some of our initiatives. Merchant will attend two weeks of the Third Committee meetings, and her deputies will cover the rest.

Freedom of Expression, Defamation of Religions  
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¶2. (C) Merchant strongly emphasized that "now is not a time for bold new initiatives" on freedom of expression, and "we must work to consolidate and maintain what we have." She said that she could not imagine a resolution passing that condemned recent infringements of freedom of expression. Furthermore, an attempt to pass such a resolution would likely lead to a religious respect resolution being proposed and passed. Despite this, Merchant said that Norway considered freedom of expression one of its "highest priorities," and Foreign Minister Stoere will be host a panel/debate on censorship of the media at the International Peace Academy on the margins of UNGA. Although Norway did not co-sponsor our Prisoners of Conscience event in NYC, Merchant said that re-opening the Declaration for further signatures was a good idea.

Zimbabwe, Sudan, Iran, Burma, DPRK, Belarus  
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¶3. (C) When asked about the possibility of being part of a cross-regional coalition to draft and co-sponsor a Zimbabwe resolution, Merchant was cautious, and said she would have to see at least a concept paper first. She stressed the potential helpfulness of SADC country involvement in the draft as well. Merchant said she did not see the "added value" in proposing a resolution on Sudan. Norway will be willing to co sponsor appropriate resolutions on Iran, Burma, and the DPRK, as it has in the past. Merchant agreed with us that the positive signals coming from Belarus indicate that it would be importunate to propose a resolution at this time, although Norway shares our general assessment of the situation.

WHITNEY